

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Frequently Asked Questions for the COVID-19 Testing Program, August 24, 2021

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General

1. Can schools/districts choose different testing for different schools within a district?

Yes. A district may choose to implement different modes of the DESE testing program at different schools within a district.

2. Can schools/districts change testing modes during the school year.

Yes. A school/district may choose to add or subtract a testing mode at any point during the school year by coordinating with their program coordinator at CIC Health.

3. Is it called "routine covid pooled testing" or "routine covid safety checks"?

The testing strategy known as “Pooled Testing” is now referred to by DESE as “Routine COVID Pooled Testing” for districts and schools. DESE conducted focus groups with representative groups of parents/guardians to identify barriers to participation. A key takeaway was that the phrase “pooled testing” did not engender trust – parents were led to believe that their students would be kept out of school. They equated the word “pooled” to “random” which sounded inaccurate and inefficient. Using the phrase “Routine COVID Safety Checks” produced positive reactions from the focus group. Participants found that this phrase promoted the welfare of students and was less intimidating than being “tested” each week. DESE recommends that all parent/guardian facing materials (parent letter, consent form/district website information) use this phrase, Routine COVID Safety Checks.

4. Will private schools have access to this pool testing service?

Yes. The DESE testing program is open to all public school districts, charter school districts, education collaboratives, approved special education schools, and private schools (including parochial and religious schools). DESE has not released guidance on the issue of private schools receiving services from the federally funded K-12 testing program, and it is suggested that private schools consult their legal counsel to address

these questions. All schools, regardless of school type, must apply through the application on the COVID-19 Testing Program section of the DESE [website](#).

5. Do schools/districts bear any costs associated with the COVID-19 testing program?

All services described in the [SY22 COVID-19 Testing Program Memo, August 11, 2021](#) and [SY22 COVID-19 Testing Program Webinar Slides, August 11, 2021](#) are provided free of charge to participating schools/districts. Schools and districts are responsible for any other costs associated with this testing program.

6. What is the deadline for submitting the application? How quickly after applying will DESE connect a school/district with CIC Health?

There is no closing date for the application, but schools/districts are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis, and schools/districts can expect to be connected with CIC Health within 48 hours of submitting their application.

7. Which components of the DESE testing program can staff participate in?

School/district faculty and staff may participate in all three modes of the DESE testing program. The program is not open to non-district employees (e.g., town/municipal employees).

8. If there are supplies left from testing in the spring, can they be used for SY21-22?

Non-expired BinaxNOW tests procured during the previous school year may be utilized during SY21-22. Schools/districts should coordinate with their program coordinator at CIC Health to determine whether other testing supplies procured during SY20-21 – namely pooled testing kits – may be utilized during SY21-22.

9. Is this program open to pre-K (and under) students?

District-run pre-K programs that are located in the same physical location as a K-12 school may participate in the program.

10. Can public school districts mandate COVID-19 testing?

No, participation in testing is optional and parents/guardians must provide informed consent to participate in the program.

BinaxNOW

11. How do schools or districts receive BinaxNOW tests? How many BinaxNOW tests can a school or district receive?

Schools/districts should request BinaxNOW kits through CIC Health. Unlike last year, schools/districts will not fill out the distribution request on DESE's website to request BinaxNOW testing kits. Schools will receive an electronic form in their welcome email from CIC Health, through which they may request BinaxNOW tests. If needed, the CIC Health program coordinator may complete the distribution request form on behalf of the

school/district. The number of kits that a school may receive is based on their student and staff population and the statewide COVID-19 incidence date. A school may request additional BinaxNOW test kits at any time through their program coordinator at CIC Health.

12. Do schools/districts need to re-complete the BinaxNOW application and CLIA certificate of waiver if this was completed during the previous school year?

No. A school that completed the BinaxNOW application and CLIA certificate of waiver during SY20-21 does not need to complete the form again.

13. How do we determine if our BinaxNOW tests are expired?

In May 2021, the FDA approved an extension of the expiration date of the BinaxNOW tests. To determine whether the expiration date extension applies to your BinaxNOW tests, take the following steps:

- Locate the “lot number” on the BinaxNOW box
- Determine if the “lot number” appears in the form [here](#).
- If it does appear, the updated expiration date is the date in the column “New Expiry.”
- If it does not appear, the expiration date is the original date that appears on the box.

14. Can the eMed at-home BinaxNOW tests be used for Test and Stay?

EMed tests may be utilized **only** if an individual who is currently in the Test and Stay protocol is participating in an athletic or extracurricular activity on a weekend or non-school day. In this case, the individual should receive one eMed test kit to take home on the last day of school prior to the activity, and take the test on the same day as, but prior to arriving at, the event. If the test is negative the individual should show the negative result to school staff (coaches, etc) at the event, and is cleared to participate. The individual should remain masked. If the test is positive, the individual should be treated as a positive case. A school or district should request the eMed tests through their program coordinator at CIC Health.

15. If a school has another antigen test, can this test be used in place of the BinaxNOW for symptomatic testing and test and stay?

A district may use another test if it wishes to do so but DESE will only provide and pay for the BinaxNOW tests.

Routine COVID pooled testing

16. What type of testing methodologies are available for routine pooled testing?

There are three testing methodologies offered for routine pooled testing:

- **Routine COVID Pooled Testing and School-Based Follow-Up Testing:** a single sample is collected at school; If a pool is positive, follow-up testing at school with either BinaxNOW and/or individual PCR testing as necessary (if the BinaxNOW does not detect a positive individual in a positive pool)
 - Samples are collected through a nasal swab
 - Samples must be collected at school. Students may collect through observed self-collection
 - Samples are processed at the Broad Institute
 - A maximum of ten samples are included in each pool
- **Routine COVID Pooled Testing and Lab-Based Follow-Up Testing – *single sample collection*:** a single sample is collected; If a pool is positive, individual Follow-Up testing occurs at the lab, without a second sample collection
 - Samples are collected through a saliva sample
 - Samples may be collected at home.
 - Samples are processed at Veritas Genetics
 - A maximum of five samples are included in each pool; samples are submitted individually and pooled at the lab.
- **Routine COVID Pooled Testing and Lab-Based Follow-Up Testing – *two sample collection*:** two samples are collected at school, after which both specimens are transported to the laboratory; If a pool is positive, individual Follow-Up testing occurs at the lab using the second sample originally collected.
 - Samples are collected through a nasal swab
 - Samples must be collected at school. Students may collect through observed self-collection
 - Samples are processed at the Broad Institute
 - A maximum of ten samples are included in each pool

17. What is the turnaround time for the routine COVID pooled tests?

The turnaround time for pooled tests is approximately 24 hours from the time of specimen collection to results being reported.

18. Where are the samples for routine COVID pooled testing processed?

The samples are processed at either the Broad Institute or Veritas Genetics.

19. Can a school choose which routine COVID pooled testing methodology it prefers?

Yes. A school/district may choose the routine COVID pooled testing methodology that is most appropriate for its school/district.

CIC Health Services

20. What qualifications will CIC Health Support Staff have?

CIC Health staff will be fully qualified to perform all aspects of the testing program that they are designated to perform, including sample collection observation and/or administration. Please note that no formal medical degree is required for sample collection observation or collection.

21. Will CIC staff undergo CORI checks prior to working in a school?

While CIC Health will conduct a CORI check on all support staff, DESE recommends that schools/districts review their own policies for visitors to determine if additional CORI (or other background) checks are needed in addition to those conducted by CIC Health.

22. Will all schools and districts receive the additional support services provided by CIC Health?

Any school/district that requests additional support services from CIC Health will receive them. If a school/district does not request support services at the beginning of the program but would like to add a later time, they may do so by coordinating with the CIC Health program coordinator.

23. If a school or districts does not have a school nurse on site, can CIC Health provide the necessary support services (e.g., specimen collection) for the school?

24. Yes. CIC Health can provide support services for test administration even if the school does not have a school nurse on-site.

25. Can non-public schools (e.g., charter schools, private schools) receive a “district coordinator” as well?

Yes. All schools that participate in the program – including private schools – are eligible for each component of CIC Health’s support services.

26. Will CIC Health also coordinate aspects of the Test and Stay program, including identifying close contacts and determining when an individual has completed the maximum number of testing days?

It will not be possible for CIC Health to identify close contacts because they will not have access to class schedules, etc. CIC Health staff will be able to assist in determining when an individual has completed the maximum number of testing days.

27. If a school/district worked with a different vendor in the Spring, can they continue to work with them for the fall?

DESE and EOHHS chose CIC Health through a competitive procurement to conduct all testing services through the DESE testing program. While districts are welcome to work with other vendors, DESE and EOHHS will only cover the costs of those services that are provided through CIC Health.

28. If a school/district worked with a different vendor in the Spring and received support services through one of their subcontractors, can they continue to work with that subcontractor in SY21-22?

Schools/districts that worked with another vendor in SY20-21 and received support services from a subcontractor through this vendor should discuss the continuing these services with their CIC Health program coordinator.

29. Can CIC Health provide support services in Western Massachusetts?

Yes. CIC Health can provide support services in all geographic areas of the state.

30. Would it be possible for a school to use their own staff for test administration?

Yes. Schools/districts may use their own internal staff for test administration. CIC Health will provide all training required for schools/districts to conduct testing using their own staff.

31. What role can the district coordinator perform?

If requested, CIC Health can provide an individual at the district-level that would oversee and coordinate aspects of the COVID-19 testing programs across all schools. While this individual would be an employee of CIC Health or its subcontractors, they would act at the direction of district leadership to deploy the COVID-19 Testing Program at each participating school. This individual could play a number of roles, including (but not limited to): scheduling testing days at different schools in a district, managing and tracking the consent process, and coordinating the support services provided to schools.

32. If a school/district previously worked with CIC Health, do they need to re-apply?

Yes. All schools/districts, regardless of previous participation status, must re-apply to the program.

33. Will CIC Health provide the standing order for COVID-19 testing?

Yes. CIC Health will provide and manage any standing order required for COVID-19 testing.

Consent

34. How does DESE recommend that schools/districts acquire consent?

DESE strongly recommends sending consent forms electronically. Additionally, DESE recommends that the consent form for testing and sample parent letter is included with other back-to-school materials that must be signed by caregivers prior to the school year. All templates (English and translated copies) for consent forms and parent letters can be found on the [COVID-19 Testing Program](#) section of the DESE website.

35. Are the consent forms for the SY21-22 DESE testing program the same as the ones used for SY20-21?

No. The consent forms for SY21-22 are different, and all individuals will need to re-consent to testing for the upcoming school year. The new consent form allows for

schools/districts to acquire consent for all three modes of testing – symptomatic, test and stay, and routine COVID pooled testing – through one form.

36. If parents/guardians consented to testing for the previous school year, does a school/district need to re-acquire consent for SY21-22?

Yes. A school/district must re-acquire consent for SY21-22.

37. Do we have to seek parental consent every time we administer a component of the COVID-19 testing program?

No. Schools/districts must only acquire consent once for all testing conducted through the DESE testing program.

38. Can the consent forms be completed electronically?

Yes. Consent forms may be completed electronically through an electronic platform managed by the school (e.g., the school's student information system or other similar program) or through the software platform provided by CIC Health. District and schools should use the sample parent/guardian letter found on the [COVID-19 Testing Program](#) section of the DESE website to communicate the opportunity to families.

39. Is there an option for parents to consent to only one mode of testing, rather than all three?

DESE encourages schools/districts to acquire consent for all three modes of testing, rather than just one or two. In the event that a school/district decides to add a component of the DESE COVID-19 testing program at a later date, the school will not need to acquire additional consent.

40. Is there a consent form for staff to participate in testing?

Yes. Staff consent forms may be found on the [DESE testing website](#).

41. Can consent be “opt out” – that is, all students are automatically consented and parent/guardians must actively retract their consent?

No, parent/guardians must actively consent to participate in testing. Since the process involves collecting a sample directly from individuals, parents/guardians must provide informed consent for all testing.

42. Can consent be acquired at any time, or only at the beginning of the school year?

Consent may be acquired at any point in the school year. DESE strongly recommends sending this consent form home with other back-to-school materials to acquire consent as early as possible.

43. Can CIC support services support the retrieval and management of consent?

Yes. CIC Health's support services, particularly the district program coordinator position, can support the retrieval and management of consent. Schools/districts should coordinate with their CIC Health program coordinator to ensure that this service is provided to their school/district.

Online platform

- 44. What online platform does CIC Health offer for its testing services? If a school/district utilized a platform through a different vendor during SY20-21, can it continue to use that platform?**

This will depend on the platform that schools were using in SY20-21, and which type(s) of testing (e.g. in-lab deconvolution with saliva versus double swabs, etc.) the district wants to do in SY21-22. Not all online platforms support all types of testing, and schools that were using Concentric by Ginkgo will not be able to use that platform in SY21-22 if participating in the DESE program.

- 45. If you participate in all three modes of the DESE testing program, will there be three separate online platforms?**

Most schools will be able to use a single platform. In rare occasions, some schools may need to use two different platforms, depending on which type(s) of testing (e.g. in-lab deconvolution with saliva versus double swabs, etc.) the district wants to do in SY21-22.

Vaccine clinics

- 46. Will mobile vaccine clinics be available when the 0-11 population (or a subset) becomes eligible for the vaccine?**

Yes. DESE/EOHHS anticipate continued availability of mobile vaccination units, especially as additional populations become eligible for the vaccine.

- 47. Can we offer the student's eligible household members the vaccine as well?**

Yes. DESE/EOHHS encourage any unvaccinated household members to receive a vaccine through a school-based clinic if they wish to do so.

- 48. Who staffs the vaccine clinics?**

The vaccine clinics are staffed by providers contracted by the State to perform vaccine administration.

- 49. If we have already hosted a vaccine clinic and would like to schedule another one, should we complete the application process again?**

Yes. Please complete the application process again to conduct an additional vaccine clinic. If you previously conducted a clinic and enjoyed your experience with a specific provider, please note this in the application.

- 50. Is there a minimum number of people needed to host a vaccine clinic?**

There is no minimum number of people need to host a vaccine clinic.

- 51. How long does it usually take for the mobile vaccine clinic to get back to you?**

Response time varies by the current request demand. DESE/EOHHS recommend submitting a request at least one week prior to the proposed clinic date.

52. If a mobile vaccine clinic is requested and Pfizer is provided, are two dates set up in advance to provide both doses?

Yes. A date will be scheduled for the mobile vaccine team to return to provide second doses.